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# **PRESS RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**March 6, 2000**

## **BORDER PATROL, STATE AND LOCAL AGENCIES CONDUCT RESCUE OPERATIONS**

**SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA:** Border Patrol Agents, joined by other state and local agencies, conducted a major search and rescue operation for stranded migrants in eastern San Diego County. The area was hit hard last night with cold temperatures and snow. Three migrants have been found dead and 30 others were rescued in the rugged, mountainous area of Cleveland National Forest since the humanitarian mission began this morning. The continuing rescue effort was a multi-agency operation, with assistance being provided by the California Highway Patrol, San Diego County Sheriff's Office and the Mount Laguna Fire Department.

A San Diego County road worker discovered the first two men walking along Sunrise Highway at about 7:30 a.m. Snow covered and showing signs of the early stages of hypothermia, the men reported that there were others in their group in distress.

The Border Patrol Search, Trauma and Rescue (BORSTAR) Team, that had been working in the area throughout the weekend, was immediately re-deployed and began search operations along with the other agencies. The search efforts expanded to three key locations in the Cleveland National Forest. Nine people were rescued near Sunrise Highway and Kitchen Creek Road, where the bodies of a man and woman were found. Six people were rescued in Corral Canyon. One woman from that group was air-lifted to a nearby hospital. Fifteen people were rescued and the body of a deceased male was found near the Mount Laguna Lodge. Nine of those rescued have been transported to local hospitals for observation. Since last night, the BORSTAR team has performed and assisted in 46 rescues of U.S. citizens and migrants.

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Bad weather in eastern San Diego County has resulted in similar situations before. Smugglers often prey upon inadequately prepared migrants, by leading them into treacherous terrain for the sole purpose of financial gain. In January, the U.S. Attorney's Office in San Diego announced the guilty pleas of three defendants charged with alien smuggling resulting in death, in connection with a similar incident during an April 1999 snowstorm.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service, U.S. Border Patrol and Mexican authorities are working together to prevent the loss of life through the ongoing Border Safety Initiative (BSI). The BSI Prevention Campaign includes the posting of warning signs where the riskiest entries occur, public service announcements in conjunction with the Mexican Consulate, and outfitting field agents with over 600 hot and cold weather survival kits. In support of the BSI, the San Diego Sector created the BORSTAR unit of 43 search and rescue agents, certified over 150 agents as emergency medical technicians, and conducts daily air patrols to search for distressed hikers and migrants.

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